THE DOOM OF EUROPEAN JEWRY

By

ISRAEL COHEN, 1879-

Reprinted by the kind permission of the Editor of
THE CONTEMPORARY REVIEW.
February 1943.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
LIBRARIES

Dr Eric Schloss
Jewish History, Literature, & Culture Collections

UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE DOOM OF EUROPEAN JEWRY.

HITLER declared war upon the Jews many years before he hurled his challenge at the civilised world. He pronounced their doom in 1920, in the programme of the German National-Socialist Party, by including in it articles demanding that the Jews be deprived of all civil rights. For thirteen years his gangs of thugs and desperados carried on a campaign of terrorism against them, wrecked their property, desecrated their synagogues, and defiled their cemeteries, until he fought his way to supreme power. He then mobilised all the resources of the State for the intensified prosecution of his policy of oppression. The Jews were outlawed, degraded, and impoverished; thousands committed suicide; tens of thousands were thrown into jails and concentration camps; and scores of thousands fled or were expelled to other lands. Revolting as their treatment had been, it was mild in comparison with the more barbarous methods that were employed as soon as the war began and that were extended as one country after another was trampled under foot by the German Juggernaut. Before the invasion of Poland, Hitler had 800,000 Jews at his mercy; by the time he had completed his conquest of Europe he had nearly 8 million. The increase in the number of victims was followed by a systematic aggravation of their persecution, which raged from the North Sea to the Black Sea and from the Baltic to the Ægean. "Perish Judah!" was the Nazi slogan, and it was carried out quite literally.

Speaking to his Reichstag on January 30th, 1939, Hitler said:

> I venture another prophecy: should the international Jewish financiers succeed in plunging the nations into another world war, then the result will be not the Bolshevisation of the earth . . . but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.

In this co-called prophecy he not only proclaimed a death-sentence upon the Jews, but also provided himself in advance with a pretext, which he knew to be false. His threat of annihilation had been made before and continued to be frequently repeated afterwards by Nazi spokesmen and journals. The weekly organ of the S.S., *Das Schwarze Korps*, had a front-page article (November 24th, 1938) containing the passage:

> We would be faced with the hard necessity of exterminating the Jewish underworld in the same way as, under our government of law and order, we are wont to exterminate any other criminals, viz. by fire and sword. The result would be the actual and final end of Jewry, its absolute annihilation.

And Dr. Goebbels wrote in *Das Reich* (June 1942): "The Jews are playing a most detestable game in this war, and they will pay with the extermination of their race in the whole of Europe and probably else-

where too." It is evident, therefore, that the German policy of destroying the Jews, which was officially condemned in Parliament by spokesmen of the British Government on December 17th, 1942, and simultaneously denounced by the Governments in Washington and Moscow, was not a recent conception or decision. It had been premeditated for years, and the diabolical plan began to be put into execution as soon as the Germans invaded Poland ; but either because the reports of mass murders of innocent people by a State that claimed to be civilised seemed incredible, or because the reported numbers of the victims seemed exaggerated, the Governments of the United Nations long refrained from taking cognisance of the outrages, and the press, with a few honourable exceptions, maintained a studied silence. The volume of detailed evidence, however, that has come into the hands of the Polish and other Governments, made it impossible to continue official silence any longer. Had the United Nations protested and issued their warnings of retribution a couple of years earlier, it is conceivable that the Germans would not have continued their orgy of slaughter to an extent that constitutes the greatest crime in human history.

The immediate cause of the declaration by the United Nations was the order reported to have been given by the German authorities that half of the Jews in Poland shall be exterminated by the end of 1942, although the order is believed to have been issued in March of that year. This monstrous decree was the culmination of a system of brutal persecution designed to cause widespread ravages among the Jews in all the countries under Nazi tyranny, but which apparently was found not to be speedy or devastating enough to satisfy Hitler's sadistic appetite. Under-nourishment, slave labour, concentration camps, and imprisonment, produced their mounting toll of deaths by starvation, disease, and suicide. But even before the application of these " administrative " methods the Germans indulged in massacre and pillage as soon as they crossed the Polish frontier. Pogroms were carried out in numerous towns, and there was hardly a single town or village in which at least some Jews were not killed in the winter of 1939-40. In many cases the barbarians made their victims dig their own graves and dance before shooting them ; in others the dead bodies lay in the streets for days, the prey of dogs and crows, before being buried. Simultaneously with this first series of atrocities the Germans began to establish Ghettos in many cities, where the Jews were compelled to live in overcrowded and insanitary conditions. A so-called " Reservation " was created at Lublin, where, after 30,000 had been herded together, a halt had to be called owing to the outbreak of typhus. The largest Ghetto was that in Warsaw, where over half a million Jews were concentrated within concrete walls eight feet high, and there was a similar walled Ghetto in Lodz, while a dozen other Ghettos (in Cracow, Bialystok, Kielce, etc.) were surrounded by electrically charged wire. Within these gloomy and congested enclosures the Jews suffered from shortage of food, fuel, clothing, soap, and medicaments, so that disease was rampant and mortality high. The Ghettos were strictly guarded by armed patrols day and night, and anybody who attempted to escape was shot.

In addition to the Jews from Poland, tens of thousands of Jews from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia were also deported to these Ghettos from October 1941 ; and in the following year vast numbers were likewise removed from Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, and finally Norway, either to Poland or occupied Russia. The trans-

portations were usually carried out in closed cattle-trucks, in which the victims were packed together, without air, food, or drink, so that after a few days' journey many reached their destination as corpses. The transfer of some 60,000 Jews from Slovakia was effected as a trade bargain, for as Germany owed the puppet State 2,500 million crowns and was unable to liquidate the debt by the supply of goods, she relieved Slovakia of her Jews at the rate of 4,000 marks per head. Other vassal States followed the Nazi example or obeyed the Nazi behests. Hungary expelled 12,000 Polish and Russian Jews long resident within her borders to Poland for forced labour, and another 60,000 from Transylvania, which she had recovered from Rumania, to occupied Russia. The Rumanians transported over 130,000 Jews from Moldavia, Bessarabia, and the Bukowina to their Ukrainian province of " Transdniestria," where the captives died at the rate of a hundred a day. And Croatia transferred several thousands to the salt mines on the Dalmatian coast, to the island of Pag, and to concentration camps near Zagreb. Among all these hosts of exiles, owing to the conditions of slavery and maltreatment, the mortality was immense.

Immediately after Hitler made war on Russia, the Germans celebrated their initial successes by massacres of Jews on a much larger scale than the pogroms in Western Poland. In the Baltic countries, Eastern Poland, White Russia, the Ukraine, and Bessarabia, the Jews were slaughtered in tens of thousands. In Vilna alone, about 60,000 were murdered before the middle of 1942 ; in Lwow, 40,000 ; in Vitebsk, 24,000 ; in Borisov and Rovno, 15,000 each ; in the Ponevezh district (Lithuania), 11,000 ; and in Mariupol, 9,000. In Kiev there were 52,000 victims, Jews and non-Jews, and in the region of Kamenetz-Podolsk tens of thousands. The Rumanians proved apt disciples of their Nazi masters by massacring 25,000 Jews in Odessa, as a reprisal for the death of 220 Rumanian soldiers killed by a delayed-action bomb left by Soviet troops, and achieved a total record of 125,000 murdered Jews under the Antonescu régime. In Yugoslavia the number of Jews slaughtered, according to reports in Istanbul, was 30,000, although the report of the Inter-Allied Information Committee states that, of a total Jewish population of 86,000, 99 per cent. were put to death. Most of these massacres were carried out with machine-guns ; thousands were drowned in the Rivers Bug and Dniester ; while in Poland two other methods were also employed—poison gas at Chelm and electrocution at Belzec.

By the spring of 1942 the total number of Jews murdered in the Nazi-dominated territories must have amounted to about one million, but Hitler was still not satisfied. According to the Note handed by the Polish Government to the Allied Governments on December 10th, 1942, Himmler, on the occasion of his visit to Warsaw in the previous March, issued an order for the extermination of 50 per cent. of the Jews in Poland by the end of the year ; and his second visit to that city in the following July was the signal for the beginning of the " process of liquidation." On July 24th, 10,000 Jews—men, women and children—were deported from the Warsaw Ghetto, followed by 7,000 on every following day. Many of the sick and old were taken to the Jewish cemetery, and killed and buried there ; but all others were removed to the extermination camps at Tremblinka, Belzec, and Sobibor. They were packed into cattle-trucks, to the number of 120 in each truck, which had room for only forty ; they had to take off their boots before entering ; and the floors of the trucks were covered with quicklime

and chlorine, so that there were many deaths on the way to the shambles. The survivors were stripped naked and murdered by machine-gun, poison gas, or electrocution, and buried by machinery in mass-produced graves. The only Jews exempted from this fate were those employed in German-owned undertakings, together with their families, so that there was the keenest competition to obtain such employment or at least bogus certificates to this effect, although these certificates, bought very dearly, were of no avail, as people were carried off indiscriminately. Hundreds of Jews daily committed suicide to escape deportation, and in order to stop the sale of poison the Germans had all chemists' shops closed. Thereupon many threw themselves down from sixth-floor windows, while others begged the privilege of being shot by the armed guards for a fee of 100 zlotys. Of the 250,000 Jews removed from the Warsaw Ghetto by September 1st, 1942, only about 4,000 are known to have been sent eastwards in the direction of Brest-Litovsk and Malachowicze, allegedly to be employed on work on the front line ; all the rest, it is feared, were done to death. Proof of the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto is afforded by the drastic diminution of ration cards. In the summer of 1941 the population of the Ghetto was officially stated to be 433,000, but only 120,000 cards were distributed for September 1942, and only 40,000 for the following month. The latter figure tallies with a report of the German Labour Office, which stated that 40,000 skilled workmen were to be allowed to remain in a part of the Ghetto, confined to barracks and employed on German war production.

The plan of extermination was worked out by the German Government with characteristic thoroughness. It was drawn up by Herman Backe, Nazi Secretary of State for Economics, in conjunction with the notorious Dr. Ley, former head of the Labour Front ; a special Commissioner, Feu, was appointed to supervise the execution of the plan ; and *Vernichtungs-Kommandos* (Annihilation commandos) were trained in Germany and sent to Poland, where they were helped by S.S. units and battalions of guards, called *junaks*, consisting of Latvians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Russian "Whites." The atrocities were perpetrated not only in Warsaw but also, over a period of several months, in a hundred other towns. The total number of victims in Poland up to the end of November 1942, according to the Note of the Polish Government, was over one million, that is one-third of the Jewish population of the country. But this does not represent the full extent of the Jewish hecatombs in Europe, as it does not include the killings and shootings in other territories, especially Rumania, occupied Russia, the Baltic countries, and the Balkans. According to a list published by the State Department of the United States Government early in December 1942 the total number of Jewish victims of Nazi savagery since 1939, who have perished or whose deportation was a prelude to death by starvation or murder, amounted to 2 million.

In all the annals of human wickedness since the beginning of time there is no parallel to this record of colossal slaughter, wholly unprovoked, deliberately planned, methodically organised, and scientifically executed. It would be futile to attempt any rational explanation of such a crime, since its motives can be sought only in pathological aberration. Nor is it by any means certain that the record is closed, for Nazi spokesmen have repeatedly threatened during the last twelve months that, in the event of Germany's defeat, their last bombs would be used to blow up the Ghettos, so that the Jews should not live to

rejoice over their oppressors. Whether the warning issued by the United Nations, that retribution will be exacted from all those responsible for the butcheries, will result in their cessation remains to be seen ; but everything possible should be done, particularly by repeated broadcasts in various languages and the dropping of millions of leaflets, to inform both the German people and the Axis confederates of the extreme penalty awaiting the culprits after the war. There are grounds for believing that some impression would be produced at least upon the vassal States, as both Hungary and Rumania have recently called a halt to barbarities.

The most urgent matter, however, is to secure the liberation of as many Jews as possible from the dreadful fate that threatens them, and for this purpose the United Nations should confer and decide upon concerted action. Hitler should be asked, as was Pharaoh of old, to let the Jews go, and if his answer were negative he will have been given the opportunity of revealing his intentions and be precluded from alleging lack of food as a pretext for massacre. The neutral and non-belligerent States in Europe should be requested to co-operate in this stupendous task of humanity by opening their frontiers to whatever refugees can escape and either to allow them unhindered transit or to grant them asylum, on the understanding that the United Nations will assume the burden of maintenance and undertake to evacuate the refugees, if desired, after the war. Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey could each play a valuable part in a scheme of salvation. Great Britain and the United States should immediately set an example by taking over the 4-5,000 Jews stranded in Spain and Portugal. Above all, every effort must be made to rescue as many Jewish children as possible ; and Iraq, which, though officially siding with the United Nations, refused the British and American requests to allow 800 children with visas for Palestine, who were held up in Persia, to pass through, and compelled them to travel by sea, should be made to give up her heartless policy of obstruction. The immigration restrictions in Palestine imposed by the White Paper of 1939 should be abolished, for that document, the product of appeasement, was unanimously rejected by the Mandates Commission and has no legal validity. Palestine could easily and immediately absorb another 50,000 Jews, who would prove a welcome contribution to the war effort. No time should be lost in investigating every possibility and taking every practical measure of deliverance, despite all the difficulties of geography and transport, so that, in the face of the greatest tragedy of all times, the United Nations may emerge from this war for civilisation not only with victory but also with honour.

ISRAEL COHEN.

Printed by The Garden City Press Ltd., Letchworth, Herts—F4652